

A Smart Future for Pembroke

Smart Growth Principle

1 *Maintain traditional compact settlement pattern*

Summary: Pembroke has one traditional compact settlement area in Suncook Village and a potential area around the intersection of Academy and Pembroke Streets, but all ordinances are silent on the topic of maintaining or enhancing these areas.

Goals:

- Maintain the rural character of Pembroke (MP p. 6).
 - Avoid “overcrowding” and “undue concentration of population” (ZO S143-3).
 - Provide for “responsible and desirable growth” and prevent “premature and uncoordinated development of land.” (SP S204-3; SR S205-3).
 - “Encourage new retail activities to locate within Suncook Village” (MP p. 7).
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Policies:

- All developments shall comply with ... the Master Plan... and the Capital Improvements Program (SP S203-28 & SR S205-27).
 - Development within 500 feet of existing water & sewer lines must connect (SP S203-42/43 & SR S205-45/46).
 - In the B1 zone, the 10,000 SF minimum lot size limits infill development.
 - In the R1 zone, the 20,000 SF minimum size for lots on water & sewer limits village type developments.
 - ZO Article XII creates an impact fee designed to require new developments to help pay for additions to municipal capital facilities.
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Analysis: The Town’s #1 Goal is “to maintain the rural character of Pembroke.” (MP p. 6) However, the central policy designed to achieve this goal--“encourage a lower density of development in those areas remote from town services” (MP p.6)--fosters results that conflict with this goal. The creation of differentiated single use zones, while intended to maintain the existing distinction between types of land use, has the effect of favoring one type--low density, rural residential.

To resolve this dilemma, the Town should consider the creation of one or two compact “village” zones, one extending out from Suncook Village and the other around the intersection of Pembroke and Academy Streets. The key to adopting a “village” ordinance is to do it in combination with other ordinances designed to preserve the historic character of Pembroke Street, to prevent suburbanization of high priority open space areas and to encourage public transportation and walking/biking trails. ZO Article X envisions Cluster Subdivisions and Article XI envisions Planned Developments. Both could be adapted to encourage village type developments.

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Foster a human scale of development

Summary: Limitations on infill development reinforce low density, suburban development in rural areas that has the unintended consequence of promoting "big box" single use developments in the commercial zone.

Goals:

- Encourage innovative design and layout in new residential areas for energy efficiency and economical use of town services. (MP p.7)
 - Design performance standards for commercial and industrial developments that will ensure their compatibility with the town's character. (MP p. 68).
 - Encourage harmonious development of the municipality and its environs. (SD 205-3-B) and encourage harmonious and aesthetically pleasing development of the municipality and its environs (SP 203-4)
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Policies:

- MP and SP are silent on the issue of human scale of development.
 - ZO Article IX establishes an Architectural Design District to insure that "proposed changes or development will be in harmony with the existing character of the surrounding area."
 - SR 205-30-B specifies soil and drainage requirements for lots.
 - SR 205-41-C-2-b requires local streets to be "laid out to discourage use by through traffic." This together with "encouraged" use of cul-de-sacs and U shaped streets may discourage interconnection desirable for neighborhoods.
 - SR 205-42 states that the Planning Board "may" require shade trees in proposed new developments.
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Analysis: Pembroke's concern with "human scale" is implicit in its goal of maintaining rural character, however, the Town's encouragement of widespread, low-density residential development creates a dependence on the automobile which tends to run counter to "human scale" both in the demand it creates for auto friendly "big box" commercial development and in the limits it places on the human neighborhood interactions in large-scale residential developments. Encouraging smaller lot size residential development and limited commercial activity in the area between Suncook Village and Pembroke Street would enhance the "human scale" of the town's development.

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Incorporate a mix of uses

Summary: The predominance of low density, suburban residential development together with the prohibition of most retail and service activities in residential zones promotes single use development in each zone. Lot size requirements in areas bordering Suncook Village and Pembroke Street limit infill development.

Goals:

- MP p. 7 & p. 66 cites a goal to "encourage new retail activities to locate in Suncook Village."
 - ZO section 143-3 is silent on the issue of mix of uses.
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Policies:

- Master Plan calls for strategies to develop an economic identity for the town, to promote the town as an employment destination and to review municipal ordinances for consistency with economic development strategies (MP p.44-45).
 - Most commercial activities are limited to the B1, B2 and C1 zones.
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Analysis: Most retail and service activities are prohibited in R1 & R3 zones. This limits establishment of new, multi-function, compact "villages." The same restriction is true for Cluster Developments. Both the Cluster Development article and the Planned Development article envision single use development, and the Cluster article requires that all owners be members of a common homeowners association. These restrictions limit the applicability of these articles to mixed-use developments.

Looking to the future the question is, "Does Pembroke want to enhance its existing built-up areas by encouraging mixed-use development on the land immediately surrounding these areas?" Amending its existing Cluster Development ordinance in such a way as to create a new mixed-use village appears to be the best way to do just that. In particular, encouraging limited commercial activity as part of the development of the area between Suncook Village and Pembroke Street would be a "smart" way to grow. In addition, by combining lower density requirements in this area with a required contribution to an open space preservation fund, Pembroke could address both its major challenges together.

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Provide safety and choices in transportation

Summary: The predominance of low density, suburban residential development together with the prohibition of most retail and service activities in residential zones promotes single use development and, consequently, virtual complete dependence on the automobile. Pembroke will have regularly scheduled service from the Capital Area Transit system. This provides a wonderful opportunity for the town to provide clean, safe and convenient stops and to encourage infill development that would promote ridership for this service.

Goals:

- MP calls for “a town road plan” (p. 6 & 7); “appropriate access control techniques” (p. 7) and “a Capital Improvements Program (p. 6). These were re-affirmed in a 1998 up-date (p. 69).
 - ZO Section 143-3 cites goal “to facilitate the adequate provision of transportation.”
 - SP 203-4 and SR 205-4-B call for “the proper arrangement and coordination of streets.”
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Policies:

- ZO definitions and use limitations are silent on the issue of transportation.
 - SP 203-29 and SD 205-39 require all developments to provide “safe and suitable access to an existing public street...” and provides for the possibility that developers may be obliged to cover the costs of improvements to existing roads that the impact of their development may require.
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Analysis: With the provision of CAT transportation services to Suncook Village and along Pembroke Street, the town has a tremendous opportunity to incorporate new transportation modes into its future development. By providing safe, clean and convenient bus stops, the town can help realize both the goal of becoming an employment destination and the goal of enhancing the retail growth of Suncook Village. In addition, by encouraging mixed-use development in the area between Suncook Village and Pembroke Street, it can further strengthen the ridership of public transportation. By providing sidewalks and bike/hiking paths in the same area, it can further reduce auto congestion in the area.

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Preserve the town's working landscape

Summary: The undifferentiated, low-density, residential zone covering the vast majority of the town, while intended to save resources by preventing high density demand for town infrastructure, has the effect of spreading residential development all across the zone. Allowing both low-density residential development and agricultural activities throughout the R3 zone puts them into competition for the same land.

Goals:

- MP p. 6 calls for: "lower density of development in those areas remote from town services;" and to "preserve and protect those areas of town that are inappropriate for or incapable of sustaining development" and for "reserving lands in remote areas for passive recreation today but allow for the flexibility of more active uses as growth and need occur."
 - MP pages 8, 9 and 65 list goals for protecting/preserving open space and working land, including reviewing ordinances to assure "no impediments to the use of property for agriculture."
 - ZO section 143-3 is silent on working landscape.
 - SR 2050-3-B calls for "open space of adequate proportions."
 - SP purposes section is silent on working landscape.
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Policies:

- ZO S143-43 lists conditions for agricultural use; it refers to the NH Department of Agriculture Manual of Best Management Practices.
 - ZO S143-44 sets policies for roadside stands and "pick your own" operations; the requirement that 50% of products come from land owned by the stand operator may penalize operators in poor production seasons.
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Analysis: Based on the results of GrowSmart NH meeting number one, many Pembroke residents believe that certain areas of currently undeveloped land are more important to preserve as open space than others. Yet, other than suitability for building, there is now no way for town policy makers to distinguish the relative value of this land. If the town established a zone of high value open space, both for commercial agricultural and for scenic and historic reasons, established a much higher (10 to 20 acre) minimum lot size and required developers given smaller lot allowances in other zones to contribute financially to a town fund designed to acquire land in this zone, Pembroke could make great progress in meeting the goals articulated by its citizens at the Smart Growth meetings. Much of the identification work for this step has been done as part of the Open Space Trail System Plan prepared for the town in 2001. It remains to integrate this work into the current Master Plan and work to implement it.

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Protect the town's environmental quality

Summary: Pembroke has a strong commitment to maintaining the quality of its air, land, rivers, streams and ponds. The town is less sensitive to the cumulative impact on these resources of the continuing spread of low-density, suburban residential development.

Goals:

- MP p. 8, 9 & 67 cites six goals for protecting Pembroke's natural resources.
 - ZO Section 143-3 cites goal "to assure proper use of natural resources...."
 - SP 203-4 "prevent development which may result in adverse environmental impacts."
 - SR 205-3-Cassure that land can be used safely and without danger to health.
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Policies:

- ZO Article IX creates four overlay districts designed to protect Pembroke's natural resources (Aquifer Conservation District, Floodplain Development District, Shoreland Protection District and Wetlands Protection District)
 - SP 203-30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 38 and Article VI and SR 205-31, 32, 33, 34 and 35 set a wide variety of environmental conditions that developments must meet.
 - SP 203-32 and SR 205-36 call for the Planning Board to "consider" a variety of energy conservation standards in reviewing applications but makes no requirements.
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Analysis: Pembroke's zoning and subdivision ordinances set very specific performance standards for the process of development. For example, "developments shall use construction methods which cause the least disturbance to the environment possible." (SP p. 20321); "existing features...shall be preserved" (SP p. 20320); and developments must have "adequate erosion and sediment control" (SP p. 20321). As long as these are followed and violations are punished, the site-specific environmental damage from development will be limited. Studies have shown that concentrated development produces less run-off than scattered development. In addition, with a concentrated development, any run-off that is generated can be located in whatever area provides for the least impact on surface and ground waters. Also, concentrated development reduces the overall impact of development on wildlife habitat. Finally, if concentrated development is accompanied by payments to a town-wide open space preservation fund, it will protect not just land that happens to border the development (which may or may not be of a high value from the point of view of the town as a whole), but whatever land is considered of highest priority throughout the town.

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Involve the community in planning and implementation

Summary: More than one hundred Pembroke residents participated in the GrowSmart NH Tool-Kit Project. They participated in public meetings designed to elicit their views about Pembroke's most important features and to consider proposals for the town's future development. These exercises have stimulated much discussion and heightened interest in the process of updating the town's Master Plan. The Planning Board and other municipal officials should utilize both the information and the enthusiasm generated by these meetings to build greater public interest and participation in the process of regulating development.

Goals:

- Neither the Master Plan nor the Zoning Ordinance nor the Subdivision Ordinance nor the Site Plan Review Ordinance explicitly cites a goal of citizen involvement.
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Policies:

- SP 203-15 and SR 205-13 call for public and abutter notice of design review sessions on new proposals.
 - SP 203-18 and SR 205-12 call for a public hearing on completed applications. Neither calls for reference to the Master Plan or Smart Growth principles.
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Analysis: The implications of Pembroke's future development extend well beyond the goals currently listed in the Town's planning documents. They affect traffic, air and water quality, schooling, housing costs, tax rates, the ability of current and former Pembroke residents to remain in or return to their hometown. These are the "in my backyard" issues that have for centuries been the hallmark of New Hampshire's civic culture of democratic involvement. Pembroke's planners and other Town officials should take every opportunity to bring these issues to public forums to get the best thinking of *all* citizens. Too often Master Plans are dry compilations of data that seem of little concern to most citizens. Pembroke has the opportunity to set a vastly different tone for its next Master Plan, one that recognizes the importance of these issues to all citizens, explicitly refers to their contributions and actively seeks their ongoing participation.

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Work with neighboring towns

Summary: Pembroke's future is clearly linked to that of its neighbors. In Concord, it enjoys a major employment/shopping center whose growth and transportation system provide the economic base of the region. In Allenstown, it enjoys a neighbor who shares the vitality of Suncook Village. In Pembroke Street it has a transportation facility that serves the dual role of internal accessibility to homes, schools and shops and the external role as a major thoroughfare. The question is how will those mutually dependent destinies be played out--in isolation or in cooperation.

Goals:

- Neither the Master Plan nor the Zoning Ordinance nor the Subdivision Ordinance nor the Site Plan Review Ordinance explicitly cites a goal of regional cooperation.
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Policies:

- SP 203-14 and SR 205-12 define projects of regional impact and call for notification of the affected municipalities and the Regional Planning Commission, but call for no specific action beyond notification.
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Analysis: As more people live in and commute from Pembroke, it becomes more necessary for Pembroke's planners to cooperate with their colleagues in surrounding communities. Cooperation with Concord in planning for CAT services is crucial to both the vitality of Suncook Village and to the viability of the mixed-use neighborhood proposed for the Academy Street-Pembroke Street intersection. Cooperation with Allenstown on the issues of mutual concern regarding Suncook Village and their shared bridges is important for both towns. Pembroke officials should meet with officials from neighboring towns to consider how cooperative efforts in the areas of public transportation, joint open space preservation and traffic management might benefit all communities.